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The Eighteenth
Century

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Samuel Bradburn.

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METHODISM

SET FORTH AND DEFENDED,

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S E R M O N,

On ACTS xxviii. 22.

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF

PORTLAND-CHAPEL, BRISTOL,

AUGUST 26, 1792.

BY SAMUEL BRADBURN.

*O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of
Jehovah. Isaiah ii. 5.*

*Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth,
why do ye not believe me? John viii. 46.*

*—If this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to
nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest
haply ye be found even to fight against God. Acts v. 38, 39.*

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A S E R M O N, &c.

ACTS XXVIII. 22.

BUT WE DESIRE TO HEAR OF THEE WHAT THOU
THINKEST; FOR AS CONCERNING THIS SECT,
WE KNOW THAT EVERY WHERE IT
IS SPOKEN AGAINST.

THE providence of God having brought Saint Paul safe to Rome, in order that he might bear witness of Jesus Christ, he loses no time; but after three days, which were probably spent in rest and prayer, (verse 17) he "called the chief of the Jews together." He always sought the Jews first; but being now bound, he could not go round to them, therefore sent for them to come to him. Having briefly and with great tenderness related the opposition which he met with from the Jews in their own country, and having obviated any suspicions which might arise in their minds from seeing him a prisoner, he beautifully introduces his main business, by intimating, that Christianity was not another religion, but an accomplishment of the expectation of every true Israelite,---(verse 20.) "For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." Doubtless the Apostle said much more

than barely the words that are mentioned; we are sure he gave them clearly to understand that he was a Christian, and that he wished them to become such also, otherwise they could not have replied as they did---“We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came, shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest, for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.”---The substance of their answer appears to be this: We have received no information, either professedly in form, or occasionally in discourse, against thee; but we have heard this sect---of the Nazarenes, every where spoken against as heretical and wicked. And as thou canst inform us whether these reports are true or false, we desire to hear what thou thinkest on this subject.

Thus was the Apostle's way prepared, and a fair opportunity given him, to explain at large the glorious Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The candor of these Jews, and their readiness to hear, are worthy of your imitation. Many of you have heard strange and shocking accounts of the people called METHODISTS. We have been represented as Heretics, Enthusiasts and Deceivers. Common justice* has often been denied us, and various species of persecution have been inflicted upon many, both of our Preachers and People. Herein we have seen the Scriptures fulfilled, which testify that, “All that will live
godly

* See the Life of Mr. Wesley, by Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore.

godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." And therefore instead of considering this treatment as a proof of a bad cause, we look upon it as a very probable mark of a good one.--- While the world remains in its present state, namely, *lying in the wicked One*, it will always oppose, in one way or other, the true religion of Christ, and they that are after the Flesh will persecute them that are after the Spirit. Nevertheless, as we ought to strive to live peaceably with all men; and to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us; more especially, on such an occasion as the present, I shall avail myself of this opportunity, First, to lay before you the Doctrines, the Experience, the Practice, and the Discipline of the people called Methodists, or our views of Christianity. And, Secondly, inquire into the causes of our being spoken against.

First, What are the Doctrines preached by the Methodists?

It will be needless to observe, that, in common with all other Christians, they believe and teach the being of a God, and the truth of the Scriptures. To dwell upon these at present, would be deemed mere loss of time. Much less is it my design to meddle with those non-essential points, about which there have been so many disputes among the real children of God. I wish these were forgotten, at least in the pulpit: And they shall, in effect, be forgotten by *me*. Neither do I intend to speak of the many distinctions which some make in the man-

her of God's working in the souls of his people. These have their place and their use. But our present inquiry is, What are the grand, leading doctrines which will be preached in this place? * These are,

1. The Fall of man. The total depravity of human nature by the sin of our first parents, "whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil." § Thus we are all by nature children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins, and prone to go astray as soon as we are born. Being shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, our heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; hence out of it "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, pride, foolishness: All these evil things COME FROM WITHIN, and defile the man." || The evil nature which produces these evil tempers and actions, we derive from our first Parents: So Saint Paul informs us, Rom. v. 12. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." As ALL never did sin personally, by an actual transgression of any known law, the meaning can only be, that, they sinned in Adam; and to this agree the following words, verses 18, 19. "By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation,---as by one man's disobedience they were made sinners."

2. This

* Portland-Chapel.

§ Ninth Article.
Mark vii, 21—23.

|| Matt. xv, 19.

2. This universal corruption of human nature, generally termed Original Sin, is the leading principle of Christianity, and is believed and taught by us, as essentially connected with the Gospel account of the Redemption of mankind by our Lord Jesus Christ. No doctrine can be clearer than this, if we believe the Oracles of God. Therein we are informed, that, Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God : That we are not our own ; but are bought with a price,---being redeemed with the precious blood of Christ ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity ;---That, other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ ; Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved ;---he alone is the propitiation for our sins, having offered himself a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. As the first earthly Adam involved his posterity in the sad consequences of his fall, so Jesus Christ the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, was manifested to destroy the works of the devil,---to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself once offered, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot. And his obedience unto death being infinitely meritorious, arising from the Divinity of his nature, the offspring of Adam, without exception, share the benefit of his Atonement, for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. And as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation ;
even

even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life. Hence Christ is called the Lamb of God, which taketh away *the sin* of the world, and a merciful and faithful High Priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

3. As the fall of man in Adam, and his redemption by Jesus Christ, are faithfully believed and taught by us, so are the doctrines which are necessarily connected therewith, in order to our enjoying the salvation of the Gospel. These are summed up by Saint Paul in two sentences, (Acts xx. 21.) "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance is, in general, a thorough change of heart and life, a turning from sin to holiness. It implies conviction of sin, and sorrow on account of having sinned, with an entire renunciation of every evil action, word and temper, and a sincere desire after a new nature. Where there is not a clear conviction in the conscience of having broken God's holy law, and thereby deserved his displeasure, it is impossible to renounce the service of Satan with that godly sorrow and self-abasement, which are necessary to the receiving the Gospel, and submitting to it as the way of salvation. But when through the law, applied by the Holy Spirit, shewing us the holiness of God and our own depravity, we become dead to the law, seeing we never can be saved by our obedience to it, we forsake every false way, and being humbled into the dust before our righteous Creator, we cry mightily for mercy through our gracious Redeemer,

Redeemer, then the Gospel becomes indeed good news, glad tidings of great joy. We then yield to the overtures of grace, and willingly accept of the offers of a free pardon.

4. When the soul is thus brought to feel, that it is an evil thing and a bitter to sin against God, and is made willing in the day of mediatorial power, to accept of Christ as its *only* Saviour, the language of the Holy Ghost to such is, Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in his only-begotten Son. He that believeth shall be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, first, respects the truth of the New Testament; believing the record which God hath given of his Son. Herein the mind of the Penitent, persuaded of the truth of the letter, discovers the gracious purposes of infinite Love in the great and precious promises. Encouraged by these, the distressed sinner is emboldened to look for deliverance. Faith, secondly, respects Christ himself as its immediate object, and is called in Scripture, coming to Christ---looking to Christ---and receiving Christ. In the last sense Saint John explains a Christian's faith very fully, "He (Christ) came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power (privilege or prerogative) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."---That receive him in all his offices, as Prophet, Priest and King. Attending to his unerring directions, depending upon his all-sufficient Sacrifice, and submitting to his power and authority.

This Faith is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word, and requires the particular assistance of the Holy Ghost to accomplish it in the soul. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure; raising you from a state of spiritual death to life eternal, through the Faith of the operation of God. Thus faith is not merely a giving credence to a proposition, a cold speculative thing; but it is also a disposition of the heart, for with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness. And, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine *heart*, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. "Christian faith is then, not only an assent to the whole Gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life; as given for us, and living in us.---It is a closing with Christ, and a cleaving to him, as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption."

5. The necessary and immediate effect of true Faith, is the free and full Justification of the Believer. Nor can there be any Doctrine of greater importance than this. For without it we have no right to heaven. Justification by Faith, without the works of the Law, was the grand point which Saint Paul laboured to establish, in opposition to the self-righteousness which the Jews rested in, and which every man, however wicked, is naturally inclined

clined to. It was this doctrine which distinguished the first Protestant Reformers : It is an Article in all the reformed Churches in Europe, was a leading principle with the original Methodists, and continues such with us at this hour. It consists (in the Gospel sense) in the being completely absolved from the guilt, and freed from the punishment of sin. Thus Saint Paul, " Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." The law of Moses, that is the moral law, the law of God, demands perfect and uninterrupted obedience. " For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. And cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." As all human obedience falls short of that conformity to the law of God which it requires, the curse rests upon all who expect to be justified by their works ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sins. Thus as all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, and as we can never make

amends for our past transgressions by our future works, the law always requiring the most perfect obedience, there is no way whereby we can escape eternal perdition but by being justified by grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ : whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. The opposite of Justification, as appears from Saint Paul's words, is Condemnation : It is God that justifieth : who is he that condemneth ? Therefore the removal of condemnation is the same thing as being justified. And as we are justified by *faith* in Christ, so our continuing in a state of condemnation, is wholly ascribed to *unbelief*. Thus our Saviour informs us, He that believeth on him, is not condemned : but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. Christ is the only Saviour ; Faith is the only Instrument whereby the penitent soul can receive him ; and free pardon is the immediate consequence of properly believing in him. Then all condemnation being removed, the Spirit of God takes possession of our hearts, enabling us to cry, Abba Father, being all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

6. The last point I shall mention at present, is the doctrine of Sanctification. This implies the entire dedication of all our powers to God, through the sacred operation of the Holy Ghost. The soul being restored to the favour of God by justification, a real

a real inward change immediately takes place, which is called in Scripture the being born again, born of the Spirit, and born of God. Every Christian Believer is transformed by the renewing of his mind, into the image of him that created us in righteousness and true holiness. The old man being crucified with his affections and lusts, we are made partakers of the divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through evil desire. In short, from being carnal and sold under sin, there is a new creation in the soul, and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. Love to God, and love to man, flowing from the love of God to us, manifest that the heavenly Adam dwells within; while humility, meekness, patience and resignation are the reigning tempers of the Faithful, who beholding with open face, as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

II. 1. Such are the grand leading Doctrines which we believe and teach. I now proceed to shew what is meant by our *Experience*. And here it will be proper to observe, that many have, either through wickedness or ignorance, misrepresented us, affirming that we pretend to the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, which the Prophets and Apostles of old possessed. Nothing can be more false than this. We never pretended to the discernment of spirits; the being able to speak or understand various languages without learning them; and particularly the working of miracles.

The direct contrary of this has been declared among us near fifty years; witness the following passage from a sermon preached by Mr. Wesley in the year 1744. "Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the Church throughout all ages; and whether or no they will be restored at the nearer approach of the *restitution of all things*, are questions which it is not needful to decide. But it is needful to observe this, that even in the infancy of the Church, God divided them with a sparing hand. *Were all even then Prophets? Were all workers of miracles? Had all the gifts of healing? Did all speak with tongues?* No, in no wise. Perhaps not one in a thousand." Those therefore do not do us justice, who charge us with pretensions of this kind. It is true, we believe, that God could as easily bestow these gifts *now* as ever he could, for he is the same from everlasting to everlasting. And we believe further, that were they necessary *now*, they would *now be given*. Nor dare we affirm that miracles are altogether ceased, seeing every extraordinary answer to prayer is, in fact, a miracle, and blessed be God, he has often thus answered our prayers by a very particular providence. But this has nothing to do with the accusation before us.

2. Neither do we pretend to seeing visions, or having revelations by impulse, or hearing voices of a supernatural kind. We profess the highest regard for REASON next to the Oracles of God; and therefore totally disapprove of all the enthusiastic jargon, which a few mistaken individuals,
among

among any description of religious people, may make use of. At the same time, we cannot so far compliment an unbelieving world, as to deny the possibility of God's vouchsafing some rare indulgencies of this nature to his peculiar favourites, on some extraordinary occasions. We have no authority from the holy Scriptures to say, There is no such thing. But we, as a people, make no pretensions to things of this sort; and when we meet with any who do, we try all they say *by the law and the testimony*; and even when there appears nothing absurd in their accounts, we observe the utmost caution respecting laying any stress on them.

3. What we mean when we talk of *Experience*, is quite different from every thing of this nature. By *Experience* we mean *knowledge obtained by practical proof*, as contradistinguished to the train of thoughts formed solely by the efforts of reason, which is called *speculation*. In other words, we realize in the feelings of our *hearts*, through the gracious influence of the Divine Spirit, those principles, to the truth of which we had before assented with our *understandings*, in consequence of their being recorded in the letter of God's word. Thus we read in Scripture the nature and necessity of Repentance; but it is very possible to define and enforce this without being truly penitent. We see Faith and its vast importance, clearly and strongly described in the holy Oracles; but the feeling power to believe is far beyond this. Nothing is plainer in the Bible than that the Sanctification of our Souls is essentially necessary to our being admitted

admitted into heaven; but it is one thing to assent to the truth of this, as a scriptural proposition, and another to enjoy the Spirit of holiness filling our hearts with divine love, and disposing us to delight in God as our chief Good. The Experience we contend for (and without which all that is called Religion will do us no real service, being only empty forms and mere opinions) is, first, the knowledge of our salvation by the remission of our sins. This the Word of God directs us to seek, promises it to those that believe, and believers are generally addressed as having attained it. Hear the Prophet Isaiah, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For this we are taught and commanded to ask in the Lord's prayer, Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. Saint Peter speaks to the same purpose: Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. And again, Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out: For Jesus Christ is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Saint Paul's commission to preach to the Gentiles was for this purpose, that they might be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ.

We

We are not only directed in the Scriptures to seek this inestimable blessing ; but also encouraged by many precious promises, that if we seek aright, by Prayer and Faith, we shall most assuredly find it. So our blessed Lord, Ask, and it shall be given you : seek, and ye shall find : knock, and it shall be opened unto you ; for whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do. Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.---These things, saith Saint John, are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name ; for, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And, saith Saint Peter, To him give all the Prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.

Nor are we encouraged in seeking this blessing barely by promises ; for Believers are mostly addressed throughout the New Testament, as having the knowledge of pardon. Many are the instances recorded in the gospel, of our Saviour forgiving sins, and declaring it to the persons who were forgiven. To mention one remarkable case : He said to the woman that followed him into Simon the Pharisee's house,* Thy sins are forgiven thee. And when they that sat at meat with him, began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also ? he replied to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace. And after the day of

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Pentecost,

* Luke vii. 48—50.

Pentecost, we find the Apostles constantly speaking of the forgiveness of sins, and the knowledge of it, not as a peculiar favour bestowed only on a distinguished few, but as the common privilege of every true believer. So Saint Paul, writing to the Christians at Ephesus,* without any exception, uses these words, We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. And in his epistle to the Colossians,§ he expresses himself in the same manner: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. It would far exceed our time to quote the numerous passages, where, either in direct terms, or by the fairest implication, he speaks the same things. Saint John also, when writing to the very lowest class of christian Believers, adopts similar language: || “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.”

How this may be known is likewise clearly pointed out in a multitude of Scriptures. “He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.---We know that we are of God---for the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.---Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.---Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your ownelves: know ye not your ownelves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.

Now

* Eph. i. 7. § Col. i. 13, 14. || 1 John, ii. 12.

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. ---Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into that grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.---And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. And wherever this Spirit is, there will not only be love, but also joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and temperance.---And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

This experimental knowledge of the forgiveness of sin, is essentially necessary to our being truly happy. Without it there must be a consciousness of guilt, a sense of the displeasure of God, and a fearful looking for of judgment.---The law still threatens, and the thoughts of death affright the guilty soul. Nothing but bad principles or a dissipated life, could render our being supportable in such a miserable condition. But the scriptures represent Christians as happy in having a sense of the Divine favour, as rejoicing in God, and as being delivered from the fear of death. So we read, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou

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comfortedst me.---We also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.---Whom having not seen, we love ; in whom though we now see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.---For Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime (till then) subject to bondage.---Sensible of this deliverance, and exulting in the triumph of faith, we can cry out, with the Apostle, O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence the knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins, is the Christian Believer's undeniable prerogative.

We believe, secondly, that all Christians experience communion with God, though not all in the same degree, nor with the same steadiness. On this head also, the Scriptures are perfectly explicit. Thus our blessed Lord praying for all that should believe, points out this great privilege ;---That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee ; that they also may be one in us :---And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them : that they may be one, even as we are one. So Saint Paul to the Corinthians :---He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit.---And, Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.

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He also reminds the Ephesians, that through Christ, whether they had been Jews or Gentiles before, as believers, they both had access by one Spirit unto the Father.---Saint John likewise bears testimony to this important truth:---That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: (that is, the same fellowship with God which we have) and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.---For, whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. ---And hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

This blessed union with God implies that we know him, and that we feel a pleasing sense of his presence. We can have no fellowship with an unknown God.---This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. But this knowledge of God is not theoretical. For, as he is an infinite Spirit, he is not an object of our outward senses: nor can the unassisted Reason of man form any just notion of him. Being also essentially holy, and the human mind being darkened by sin, the natural man
receiveth

receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth all (the) things (of the Spirit,) yet he himself is discerned of no (natural) man. To know God aright there must be a disposition suited to the object.---Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.---But blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. These having put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and true holiness:---and being renewed in the spirit of their mind; they behold, by faith, the face of God in righteousness: they awake with his likeness and are satisfied. Thus in his light they see light: They are wise with his wisdom, holy with his holiness, and happy in his love.

Should it be objected---All this is true, as it respected the primitive Christians; but there is no such thing now; these blessings being only intended to strengthen their Faith till Christianity should be established in the world. I answer---

1. If it could be proved from scripture, that the first Christians were to enjoy the *exclusive privileges* of knowing the forgiveness of sin, and having communion with God, it would prove too much: namely, that the first Christians alone were bound to perform the duties enjoined therein. For, by what rule of logic, or criticism, can it be proved, that we are bound to perform the duties described and enjoined in the Bible, and yet be denied the
privileges

privileges mentioned therein? especially, as the enjoyment of those privileges is expressly said to be necessary in order to the right performance of those duties? *Without me, saith Christ,* ye can do nothing.* That is, as the context shews, without the assistance of my Spirit, ye can no more bear fruit to the glory of God, than a branch can bear grapes when broken off from the vine. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.”§ Either then we must be drawn by the Father, that is, disposed by the Spirit of God, or we cannot come to Christ. And we must either know and enjoy what the first Christians did, or we cannot glorify God in the same manner. In the latter case the Scriptures would only serve to tantalize us, by shewing us how blessed a state Believers were in at the commencement of our holy religion; leaving us to lament that our situation was so much inferior to theirs. This would also invert the order of God, in whose dispensations, from the first opening of the covenant of grace, we constantly observe the greater following the less, till life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel. Besides, as the Scriptures represent the things treated of in them, as of the utmost importance to the human race; and as there is no nation mentioned where, nor time fixed when, they shall cease to be binding, you must either give up the Bible, as it gives you no authority to separate its injunctions and its privileges, or you must allow, that *what was Christianity once, is, and will be Christianity*

* John xv. 1—8.

§ John vi. 44.

tianity every where, and at all times. And that, if we be not such Christians now, as would have been admitted into the Church at Jerusalem immediately after the day of Pentecost, we are not right in the sight of God, nor fit for the kingdom of heaven. And,

2. With regard to *Christianity being established in the world*; it may be asked, Where is the country in which it is established? It is indeed established on paper in many countries: But *Christianity* cannot be said to be established among Drunkards, Swearers and Liars; among Harlots and Whoremongers, Adulterers and Adulteresses; among Cheats, Thieves and Perjured Persons. And, alas! what Country, City or Town, but abounds with such! And if a comparative few are free from all these, are they not, generally, Proud, Self-willed, Lovers of Pleasure and not Lovers of God? Are they not Self-righteous, having barely a Form of Godliness, but denying the Power thereof? Look around you in this Kingdom, which I will not suppose the worst in the world, is vital Godliness, scriptural Christianity established throughout this Land? Do not the vices I have named, abound every where? And that such persons as are guilty of any of these, cannot be true Christians, is clear, from the express testimony of God's word: (1 Cor 6. 11.) "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall in

inherit the kingdom of God. And let none imagine that by inheriting the Kingdom of God is meant merely that such cannot go to Heaven when they die, though that is true; but the meaning here is, they are not, they cannot be real Christians; for he adds---And such *were* some of you: but ye *are washed*, but ye *are sanctified*, but ye *are justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."* And as touching the *tempers* that generally prevail, even where some decency is observed in the outward behaviour, are not these perfectly inconsistent with real Religion? A conviction of this made the pious compilers of our excellent Litany put in this petition against them ---From all *blindness of heart*; from *pride*, *vain-glory*, and *hypocrisy*, from *envy*, *hatred*, and *malice*, and *all uncharitableness*, Good Lord deliver us. But are all who approve of, and join in using this petition, in earnest for its accomplishment? Are not tens of thousands, who have used it for many years, just as much under the power of blindness of heart, pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy as ever they were? Are they not as subject to envy, hatred malice, and all uncharitableness, as if such a petition did not exist? And even where some pains are taken to repress these, do not many trust in themselves that they are righteous? Do not multitudes in this nation, as really depend upon the merit of their own performances for eternal salvation, as the persons of old, whom our Lord calls whited walls and painted sepulchres? And to whom he said---Ye
D serpents,

* See also, 1 Tim. i. 9, 10. And vi. 3-5.

serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Of whom also he warns us, that except our righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven!

3. If we add to these facts, that Unbelief prevails throughout (what by a figure of speech, is called) the Christian world, perhaps, more than ever it did; that *Deism* and *Materialism* are spreading daily, especially among the youth of the higher circles of life, it must appear to every considerate person a point of the utmost moment, to have an *experimental proof*, that we are not following cunningly devised fables. The more so, as this is the *strongest*, indeed, all things considered, the *only* useful evidence of the truth of our holy religion. For, whatever evidence we have besides, if we have not an experimental proof that the things recorded in the scriptures are true, we shall be no gainers by Christianity. It is the more necessary for us to insist upon this now, as numbers who have the care of souls, are so far from teaching the people the good and the right way, that they do not know it themselves, nay, are bitter enemies to it, witness both the pulpit and the press!*

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* See the Bishop of St. David's most excellent Charge to the Clergy of his Diocese, delivered at his primary Visitation in the year 1790. The following extract will shew his Lordship's sentiments on this point, and justify my remark.

"Some erroneous maxims are gone abroad, which, for several years past, if my observations deceive me not, have very much governed the conduct of the parochial Clergy in the ministrations of

Upon the whole, what is there in this experience that is not strictly rational? If the holy Scriptures be true, which we now take for granted, and if we take the advice therein given, is there any thing unreasonable in our enjoying the unspeakable blessings which we find promised to such persons? The changes which daily take place in our judgments of many things with which we are concerned, and the effects produced thereby in the sensations of our hearts, are sufficient to prove the possibility and reasonableness of christian experience. Love and Hatred, are frequently felt toward the same

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object,

of the word. One is, That the Laity, the more illiterate especially, have little concern with the mysteries of revealed religion, provided they be attentive to its duties.—Another is, That practical religion and morality are one and the same thing: that moral duties constitute the whole, or by far the better part of Christianity.

“Both these maxims are erroneous. Both, as far as they are received, have a pernicious influence on the ministry of the word. The first, most absurdly separates practice from the motives of practice. The second, adopting that separation, reduces practical christianity to heathen virtue; and the two, taken together, have much contributed to divest our sermons of the genuine spirit, and favour of christianity, and to reduce them to *mere moral essays*: in which moral duties are enforced, not, as indeed they might be to good purpose, by scriptural motives, but by such arguments, as no where appear to so much advantage as in the writings of the heathen moralists, and are quite out of their place in the pulpit.

“Thus, under the influence of these two pernicious maxims, it too often happens, that we lose sight of that which is our proper office, to publish the word of reconciliation, to propound the terms of peace and pardon to the penitent; and we make no other use of the high commission that we bear, than to come abroad one day in the seven, dressed in solemn looks, and in the external garb of holiness, to be the APES of EPICTETUS.” Arminian Magazine, June, 1792.

object, viewed in different lights. Joy and Sorrow are felt on account of the very same occurrences, owing to an alteration in our opinion respecting them. We feel Hope and Fear from one and the same cause, by reason of some change having taken place in the notions we had formed of its nature and properties. In short, the thing that excites the most ardent Desire one hour, may the next excite the most determined Aversion, being no longer in our conception what we before thought it. These undeniable operations of our speculative and active powers, are not more self-evident, than christian experience is to the person who has it. But he that has it not, is not, cannot be a judge of what it is. Suppose a man never to have felt hunger or thirst, could all the reasoning in the world give him a just notion of these appetites? Does not every one know that these, and many things besides, can only be known by being felt. To apply this to the different stages of religion: If a careless sinner, accustomed to follow his own inclinations without any fear of God, should hear, or read, "He that committeth sin is of the Devil;" and "The soul that sinneth it shall die;" is it possible for him seriously to think of the vast importance of these awful sentences without feeling some uneasiness? and in proportion to the attention paid to the subject, must not his uneasiness increase from simple fear to horror and anguish of spirit? A clear view of the holiness and justice of God, and of his own sinfulness, would excite such sensations in his soul, as the convicted Jews felt on the

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the day of Pentecost, when they were pricked in their heart, and cried, Men and brethren what shall we do? or as the Jailor at Philippi felt, when the earthquake shook the foundations of the prison, and caused him to come trembling to Paul and Silas, saying, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

Should a man, like Saul of Tarsus, be alive without the knowledge of the Law, and be full of self-righteousness, be good in his own esteem, and expecting heaven for his own merit; suppose such an one, to discover the imperfection of his obedience to the divine law, how acute must be the pain of his mind in consequence of this discovery! How different is this experience from cold speculation! When the understanding contemplates the Deity with philosophic calmness, the grandeur of his eternity, immensity, power and wisdom, fills the soul with sublime ideas. And while we view him at a distance, as a Being with whom we have little to do, the elevation of our thoughts may continue to please our imagination. The poetic descriptions of Jehovah, as bowing the Heavens, making the Clouds his Chariot, and walking upon the Wings of the Wind, may charm our fancy, and excite nameless sensations in the enchanted passions. But when all this glory is viewed only as the glory of the Judge going to pass the sentence of death upon the guilty sinner, how changed are all our feelings! The Wisdom with which we were delighted, now fills us with terror, because we cannot shun its penetration. The Power and Greatness upon which we meditated with pleasure, now
cause

cause the most painful apprehensions, arising from conscious guilt and conscious weakness. In the former case, like Job when endeavouring to justify himself, each of us may say to our Maker, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear."---In the latter, like him when convinced of his sinful condition, every awakened soul may cry out, "now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself; and repent in dust and ashes." How sensible are these changes!--How clear is this Experience!

Again, should a person filled with religious concern become acquainted with the blessed truths of the Gospel; should he perceive the infinite fulness of merit that is in Christ; and should he read and understand such encouraging passages as these,---
 "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.---Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.---And him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." How would he be assisted to look for mercy! Suppose him to reason and pray thus: These promises are given to encourage distressed sinners to expect forgiveness. They are made to the chief of sinners. None shall be rejected who come petitioning the throne of grace.---I am the chief of sinners---I have nothing to pay, and nothing to plead of my own.---I feel my sins a burden---I lift up my guilty soul, O God, to thy tremendous throne, and acknowledge thy justice shouldst thou cut me off by death, and plunge me into endless misery.---But I plead thy Love in giving thine only Son to die for me; I plead his all-suffi-

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cient sacrifice, with which thou art well-pleased:---
 I plead thy faithfulness to accomplish thy promises
 in which thou hast caused my soul to hope.---Thou
 wilt be gracious to me ; O Lord, be merciful and
 pardon ! Thou wilt pardon even me ; God my
 Saviour, take away my burden and give me rest ;
 thou wilt hear me, thou dost even now draw
 my spirit to thyself ; thou wilt deliver my soul
 from death, mine eyes from tears and my feet from
 falling ; and I shall walk before God in the light of
 the living. While the soul is thus reasoning with
 God, and praying and striving to believe as direc-
 ted in the Gospel, either the New Testament is a
 fable, (which is not possible) or such humble peni-
 tents must find deliverance. But this deliverance
 cannot take place without being felt. Whether
 the sorrow be turned into joy in a moment, like a
 flash of lightning, as appears to have been the case
 with the trembling Jailor, and with many in the
 Gospel, and which many of us are living witnesses
 of ; or whether the peace of God that passeth all
 understanding gently diffuse itself throughout the
 sweetly yielding spirit, like the gradual rising of the
 sun, in either case the soul is conscious of the
 change. And is there any thing enthusiastic or ir-
 rational in this experience ? If we allow even the
 being of a God, we must in reason suppose him to
 have power to move upon the souls he has made ;
 and if so, where is the difficulty of his making known
 his love to those who are properly disposed to re-
 ceive it ? Surely the body can no more obstruct
 the divine operations than a shadow can obstruct
 a person's

a person's walking through it. And certainly we ought to make the trial to obtain this blessed experience in the way God has pointed out, before we dare to conclude that it is all a delusion. If we presumptuously attempt to make our depraved reason the only guide that we will follow, and reject the counsel of God, it must be against our own souls. God every where puts honour upon his own word. And they alone, who humbly and earnestly endeavour to do his will, shall know of the doctrines whether they be of God. And the degree of our experience must depend upon our entering by mighty faith into the very spirit of God in and by the word. Without this we cannot tell the meaning of many portions of scripture. Thus, if we have but a small measure of faith, we can see but a little of that fulness of joy that is in God's presence, and taste but a little of that pleasure which is at his right hand for evermore. We shall feel but little love, and enjoy but a small portion of heavenly peace. We shall often waver and grow faint in our minds. The opposite evils to all the graces of the Spirit will perplex us, and a partial salvation will be the utmost of our attainment. But if, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we press through all opposition, toward the mark, for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus, we shall prove the greatness of the Gospel-privileges. If we keep the eye of faith steadily fixed upon the promises, being firmly persuaded that, faithful is he who made them, and he will

will fulfil them ; our views of spiritual things are clearer, we take a faster hold of eternal life, and experience such divine strength, as makes us more than conquerors in all our combats with the powers of darkness. When the humble soul loses itself in unreserved resignation to the will of God, victorious faith leads on triumphant love, " meridian evidence puts doubt to flight, and ardent hope anticipates the skies." Nor is it more our privilege than our duty, to strive to be like Christ in the whole of our disposition. To be sanctified throughout in spirit, soul and body ; rising superior to the world, the flesh and the devil, till perfect love casting out all tormenting fear, we are filled with all the fulness of God, and enabled to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in every thing to give thanks. And can any thing be more perfectly conformable to right reason than this experience ? or any thing more to be desired ? It is this that gives us true dignity of soul.---Sharing the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, and shining as lights in a benighted world.---To resemble our Maker and enjoy him, is the highest state of excellence to which we can in time or in eternity be exalted. In fine, this is the sum of Christian Experience : it is *feeling the truth* ;---it is *handling the word of life* ;---it is *tasting that the Lord is gracious* ;---it is *Grace in Nature* ;---it is HEAVEN upon EARTH ;---it is *GOD in MAN !*

III. Having largely considered what we mean by *Experience*, let us now attend to the *Practice* of

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those who enjoy it, or who are earnestly desiring and seeking it.

1. It will be but saying little to observe, that, they aim at being inoffensive. Not that it is possible in the present state of things, but offences will come. But certainly all who have any claim to the lowest degree of the Experience just described, will carefully watch their words and actions, so as not willingly to give offence to Jews or Gentiles, or the Church of God. They are not busy bodies in other men's matters. They study to be quiet and do their own business, exercising themselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men; endeavouring as much as in them lieth, to live peaceably with all men. They take all possible care not to disturb either the Families, or the Neighbourhood where they live. It would seem almost needless to observe that such do not take God's name in vain; get drunk; or give way to any species of lewdness; but they likewise avoid all quarrelling, brawling, evil-speaking, all diversions which are not to the glory of God; or any thing that would injure the persons, the property, or the character of any one; the going in debt without a probability of paying it, or doing to others in any thing as they would not they should do to them. In short, all who have any solid foundation to think the experience of a Christian Believer their own, will be harmless, quiet people.

2. All such will likewise endeavour to do good of every possible sort, and as far as it is possible to
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all men. They see and feel the force of our Lord's words: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. And those of Saint Paul, This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works: these things are good and profitable unto men. And the grace of God, teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Likewise those of Saint Peter, Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly desires, which war against the soul: having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. To instance in a few particulars. Those who believe the Doctrines we preach, and enjoy the Experience we plead for, will be in every kind merciful after their power: To the Bodies of their fellow-creatures, by giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, and by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison; particularly, (as Saint James speaks) the fatherless and widows in their affliction. In order to this, they will be diligent in business, and faithful to the unrighteous mammon; neither squandering their substance in riotous living, like the prodigal son; nor like the unprofitable servant, hiding their talent in a napkin, by laying up unnecessary treasures upon earth.

But exerting their abilities, their substance, and their influence, not grudgingly, nor of necessity, but with a ready mind, it is their constant wish to make all around them happy, imitating their Divine Exemplar who went about doing good, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Should such be poor themselves, as is often the case, (for God hath generally chosen the poor of this world) and have nothing to spare, yet they can join others, who have this world's goods, and shew their love to mankind by striving to do good to their souls; by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with: trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that "We are not to do good, unless *our hearts be free to it.*"

3. To their works of *mercy*, they add works of *piety*. They do not forsake the assembling themselves together to pray to their heavenly Father, to join in his praises, to hear his word, and to partake of the Lord's supper. They do not imagine, like some conceited Fanatics, that any degree of grace will ever raise them, while in the body, above the necessity of using all the outward ordinances of God. They are also conscientiously exact in the performance of Family and Private Duties. And as touching their personal conduct, they endeavour to commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; avoiding all needless self-indulgence, denying themselves and taking up their cross daily; laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset them, and running with patience

patience the race that is set before them. Labouring continually as Husbands or Wives, Parents or Children, Masters and Mistresses or Servants, to fill up their stations, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. In a word, having imbibed a portion of the Spirit of the blessed Jesus, they strive to walk as he also walked.

IV. It only remains that we take a view of the Discipline, which for many years we have found of great use, in preserving our people together. On this head I need say but little, as the rules are printed, and well known to many of you. But I will just observe, that every part of our Discipline is agreeable to the holy Scriptures, and is briefly contained in the following particulars.---

1. All who are in connexion with us meet in what we call a *Class*: That is, from twelve to about twenty members, having a person of more experience than the others (who is termed the Leader) to watch over them, meet together once a week, at the time and place most convenient to them. The Leader gives out a few verses of a hymn, which they all join in singing. He then makes a short prayer; after which he converses with each member about Christian experience, giving suitable advice to all, and again they sing and pray, concluding all in about an hour. And are not these meetings agreeable both to the Old Testament and the New? In the dark state of the Jewish Church, when both People and Priests were in general (as is too much the case now) careless, and even wicked; "Then, saith the Prophet Malachi, they that feared the Lord,

Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." And to meetings of this kind, we conceive the Apostle Paul alludes, where he advises the Colossians thus : " Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." And where this company is thought too large to speak their minds freely, many meet also once a week in smaller companies called *Bands*, consisting of four or five persons, men with men, and women with women. Nothing can be more simple than these meetings. And we think the Apostle James's words are best understood, by supposing something of this kind,---" Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed." But let it be well observed, there is nothing in these assemblies like the confession of sin to a Priest, in order to obtain absolution from him ; but the speaking freely of their state of mind to one another, that they may know how to rejoice with those that rejoice, and to weep with those that weep, which they could not do without some acquaintance with each other's condition.

2. In large Places the Minister meets the Society all together, on Sunday Evenings after public service, and gives general or particular directions, according to the account he has received through the preceding week. He then also mentions any business

business that is to be done, respecting either the spiritual or temporal concerns of the Society; relates any remarkable accounts he may have heard of the prosperity of the work of God in other places, and concludes with prayer. These meetings, when judiciously managed, are of admirable use. The people are frequently much refreshed therein, and their union greatly strengthened.

3. To prevent our being imposed upon by bad people, the Superintendent Minister, or another by his direction, meets every class separately, once a quarter, and speaks personally to each member. Those that have walked agreeable to the Gospel the past quarter, receive Tickets, with a portion of Scripture printed on them, also the Month and Year, and a letter of the Alphabet, which being the same in all places, an impostor can generally be detected. And we conceive that something of this nature was used in the primitive Church, especially when any of them went to strange places. ("These Tesseræ, as the ancients called them, being of just the same force with the *commendatory letters* mentioned by the Apostle.) These are likewise of use in other respects. By shewing these to the persons appointed to regulate the Society, whenever it meets apart, it is easily known who are members. These also furnish us with an easy method of removing any disorderly member. He has no new Ticket at the quarterly visitation, and hereby it is known, that he is no longer of our community."

4. There are two other kinds of meetings which we observe, and which were both of ancient usage.

These

These are Love-feasts* and Watch-nights. The former is alluded to by Saint Jude, verse 12. where speaking of the evil doers who associated with the Christians, he says, These are spots in your feasts of love. And of these it is generally supposed Saint Peter speaks, 2 Ep. ii. 13. At these, which are kept in large Societies once a quarter, each person takes a bit of plain Cake and a little Water. We sing a few hymns, two or three of the Ministers pray, and if any person has any thing particular to say concerning Christian Experience, none are hindered, if they be short, as the whole should conclude in about an hour and a half. But these have no relation at all to the Lord's Supper. The elements of the Lord's Supper are Bread and Wine, (which we receive exactly agreeable to the form in the Common-Prayer Book) whereas at the love-feasts we use only Cake and Water. The design being simply to testify our Christian Love to each other.

The Watch-nights were anciently the Vigils kept on the Evenings preceding the grand Festivals. Our custom is, about four times a year, in the large places, to meet between eight and nine at night, and after one of the Ministers has preached, several others pray and exhort, giving out at intervals suitable hymns, which the congregation join in singing, concluding at twelve o'Clock. Exceeding great are the blessings we find on these occasions. They are times of great solemnity, and often tend
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* Vide Plin. Ep. ad Traj. Lib. X. Ep. 97. Lard. Test. Heath
ii. 9. p. 40.

to animate our devotions, and stir up our minds to a more earnest concern for our eternal welfare.

5. For the management of all temporal affairs, there are persons of known piety, as well as having skill in accounts, chosen, to whom the care of these things is committed. These Stewards, or (as they were called in the primitive Church) Deacons, receive what money has been collected by the Leaders in their Classes, either for the Poor, or for the Expences of carrying on the work. They keep exact accounts of all they receive and disburse, which accounts are audited once a quarter, when there is a meeting of the Ministers of the Circuit with the Stewards from every place, at which meeting every thing relating to temporal concerns is publicly settled.* The Stewards being changed every two years, prevents jealousies and evil-surmisings, and gives every proper person in the Society an opportunity of serving in his turn. Nothing can be more reasonable than this. If being a Steward be an honour, why should not all who are capable, share it? If it be a cross, why should not all take it up?

6. The last thing I shall mention which relates to our Discipline, is the constant change of the Preachers. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, and in many of the Epistles, that the first Preachers

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* *N. B.* The other office among us, namely, that of the *Trustees* is a legal concern. As *Trustees of the Chapels*, they have no authority at all to interfere either with the *spiritual* or *temporal* concerns of the people. The first belongs to the *Preachers and Leaders*: The second to the *Preachers and Stewards*.

went from place to place as the providence of God opened their way. And many years' experience has proved to us the utility of this plan. The three Kingdoms are divided into a number of Districts: each of these Districts is divided into Circuits: and each Circuit has two, three, or four Preachers, according to its situation and importance. Again each Circuit has a Superintendent,* who has the care of every thing entrusted to him. Not that he is exempted from any part of the work, or has any temporal advantage from his office: Much less has he any power to lord it over either his brethren, or over the people; only some one must keep the various accounts of the Circuit, and see that every thing be done agreeable to the Rules of the Society and the Minutes of the Conference. Every District has a Chairman, to whom either Ministers or private Members may complain, in any case that cannot be redressed in his own Circuit. The Chairman can then summon the Preachers of the District, and their judgment is conclusive till the annual meeting of the Conference, (which consists of at least one from every Circuit) whose decision is final. At the Conference every Preacher's character is examined, and if any objection be proved against him, he receives suitable punishment, whether it be Reproof, the being put from the office of Superintendent, (if he have been in it) the being

suspended

* While the Rev. John Wesley lived, this Preacher was called the Assistant, on account of his assisting him. Now he is dead, that word is no longer sense, seeing it has no relative to which it can with propriety be referred.

suspended for a time, or entirely excluded. The Ministers are then stationed, according to the best judgment that can be formed, where they are most likely to be useful, no one continuing above two years successively in one circuit, unless God has been pleased to use him as the Instrument of a remarkable revival; and even then, no one ever stays above the third year. Thus every thing is carried on with decency and order. The Quarterly Meetings are subject to District Meetings, and these are subject to the Conference, or General Assembly, over which, among us, there can be no control, and from whose determinations there is no appeal.

Such are the Doctrines, Experience, Practice, and Discipline of the People called Methodists.--- In a word, such is METHODISM: Or, to speak more properly, such is CHRISTIANITY, as believed and taught in our Connection.

II. Let us consider, Secondly, why we are every where spoken against. And let it be remembered, that they were the *Christians* who were spoken against in St. Paul's time. Nor do I know one reason why the *Methodists* are spoken against now, but such as caused the *Christians* to be spoken against then. The very term METHODIST is not a more striking mark of reproach, in the esteem of the ignorant and ungodly at present, than the term CHRISTIAN was, when first applied to the Disciples of Christ at Antioch.* And if the sufferings of the primitive Christians exceeded the sufferings of the Methodists *as a Body*; yet, many *Individuals*

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have

* Acts xi. 26.

have (not only had their property destroyed, but have) lost their lives, in consequence of the barbarous manner in which they were treated, because they dared to worship God according to the holy Scriptures and the dictates of their own Consciences! Magistrates and Ministers have countenanced, yea, openly encouraged the ferocious Rabble in the perpetration of their lawless outrages.* In several places, Crimes, of which they were perfectly innocent, were laid to the charge of those who were called Methodists, and they were forced to submit to the savage fury of their cruel Persecutors. The goods of some of our people have been sold in the open streets, to pay fines which were levied upon them by virtue of the *Conventicle Act*; an act which was not designed in its original institution, for the base purposes to which it *has, in these cases*, been prostituted. And though, at present these violent proceedings are not so common; yet, the same malevolent spirit shews itself in the Conversation and Writings of our Enemies. Thus it was of old, a cessation of the rage of persecution, did not hinder the first Christians from being *every where spoken against*. Lies and slander were propagated concerning them, and men spake falsely all manner of evil concerning them for Christ's sake. They were, out of derision, called a *Seet*, (from *Seco*, to cut or divide) because they separated from the evil-doers of their time, and would not conform to the spirit

* In proof of these assertions, see Nelson's Journals, Mr. Wesley's Works, the Arminian Magazine, and Mr. Wesley's Life by Dr. Coke and the Rev. Mr. Moore.

spirit, maxims, and customs of an ungodly world; but chose to keep close to God and each other, in the way to the kingdom of heaven. The same cause continues to produce the same effects.--- Wherever any people determine to serve God in earnest, they must expect opposition; and they may think themselves highly favoured, when they are *only spoken against*. It is impossible to account for this, without supposing either that there is something bad in the Christian Religion, which stirs up Mankind to just indignation against its professors; or that there is something in human nature so exceedingly wicked, that it cannot bear those who are good. Though the latter be sufficiently clear to us; yet, as there have been men corrupt enough to assert the former, it may be worth while briefly to investigate the subject.

Only let it be observed, that in speaking of opposition, there is not the least reference to the controversies which men may have about *religious truth*. As every man is to give an account of himself to God, every man has an indefeasible, unalienable right to think and speak freely on all subjects purely religious. And the Gospel of Christ gives no Man, nor Body of Men, whether Councils or Convocations, Parliaments or Kings, the least authority to hurt any human being on account of his religious opinions, or his mode of worship. The smallest degree of coercion on account of religion, is persecution, than which nothing can be more contrary to the genius of the New Testament. If men in disputing with each other suffer improper
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tempers to lead them astray, or mix other things with religious subjects, so as to injure their neighbours, they are so far culpable, and religion is so far out of the question. But as free inquiry is necessary to the advancement of Religion, which being of the utmost importance to mankind, as it concerns their eternal interests ; it is depriving men of the dearest of all privileges---it is robbing them of their natural birthright, to limit religious liberty by penal laws, or to lay the least restraint on the conscience of any man, in matters which concern only him and his God.---It is interfering with the government of Christ, who is the only Head of the Church, to make men accountable, without their own consent, to any being but Him, for their religious principles, so long as they do not interfere with the good of Civil Society. It is not therefore controversial opposition that we are considering ; but the being hated and reviled on account of being religious. But is there not something of bad tendency in our religion ? something which naturally excites mankind every where to speak against us ? This is the question.

1. This we would hope is not because we believe the Bible to be a divine revelation. The Jews persecuted the followers of Christ with the greatest bitterness ; but they never charged them with being enthusiasts for believing Moses and the Prophets. Neither did they pretend that the Christians did not believe these writers to be divinely inspired. The case is much the same at present. The holy Scriptures are generally received in this country as the
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word of God ; we receive them as such ; therefore we ought not to be blamed on this account. And yet when we search narrowly into the matter, we shall find that this is one great cause of our enemies being enraged. If they allow the authority of the Scriptures, we ask no more. For the most part they are ashamed to refuse us this ; and as we contend for nothing but what is scriptural ; we turn their own weapons against them, by proving their conduct to be inconsistent with these sacred records, and this frequently stings them to resentment. On this ground we are willing to face our most powerful adversaries : Shew us that any thing for which we plead is not scriptural, and we will instantly renounce it. If so, why should we be spoken against by those who profess to believe the Bible.

2. Is it that we are thought enemies to Morality ? This is impossible, as every branch of the most refined morality is taught in the Gospel, and consequently included in a Christian's practice. It is true, we see clearly that Morality alone cannot bring us to heaven, because it has nothing to do with heaven. Morality consists in the duties which men owe to men, arising from their situation in this life. Considering their mutual obligations as they stand related to each other, they see the necessity of being strictly honest, and of helping one another in trouble ; because no one loves to be injured, and every one feels that he wants, or may want the assistance which another stands in need of. But the motives by which men are prompted to the practice of these moral virtues, spring from no higher

higher source than a regard to the good of Society, Whereas Religion, which consists in love to God and Man and Good Works, springing from Faith in Christ, and with an eye to an eternal world, includes the purest and most extensive Morality, "as the greater perfection includes the less." Therefore, though nothing can be more certain, than that a man may be "irreproachable in his moral conduct, and at the same time be perfectly irreligious and profane. Irreligious and profane in that extreme, as to be in danger of being cast at last into outer darkness, with his whole load of moral merit on his back ;"* yet, to make any pretensions to the Christian Religion, without being strictly moral, is "*vain and scandalous*. *Vain*, because such pretenders want the substance of Religion, i. e. such uniform piety as should produce obedience : *Scandalous*, because they dishonour Religion, and vilify Christianity in the esteem of the world."§ There is therefore no shadow of reason for charging us, or any true Christians with the want of a proper regard for Morality. But

3. Are there not some evils consequent on our manner of proceeding, which cause us to be spoken against? It highly concerns us to clear ourselves from this charge. And, thanks to Divine Goodness, it is easily done. If our enemies knew any evil of us, we have had sufficient proof of their willingness to expose us, by making it public.--- We wish not to have any mercy from those who watch

* The Bishop of St. David's Charge.

§ Heyl, Theo. Lect.

watch over us for evil. We say to all such, Which of you convinceth us of sin? While they prove nothing, we take it for granted, they cannot. To be a little more particular, let us consider this point,

1. As to *Individuals*.---It is certain Drunkards have become sober; Liars have learned to speak the truth---indeed, sinners of every description have been converted from the error of their ways, by our means. But where is the instance of one person becoming vicious in any respect through Methodism, who was virtuous before? I believe there never was an instance of this kind. And in the judgment of every candid person this must be greatly in our favour. It is possible there may be bad people among us. It would be a miracle, if, among a hundred thousand people, in a world like this, there were none to be found who acted contrary to the Gospel. But as all such are absolutely excluded from our Society as soon as they are discovered, it would be disingenuous to accuse the whole body on their account. Besides, if a few were found in every large Society at every quarterly visitation, who had disgraced their profession, this could no more, in reason, be charged upon *Methodism*, than the sin of Ananias and Sapphira at Jerusalem, and that of the incestuous person at Corinth, could upon *Christianity*. Or than Robbery and Murder can be charged upon our excellent Liturgy, because most of the Robbers and Murderers who are hanged, profess under the Gallows, that, *they are Members of the Church of England!**

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* Vide Newgate Register, and Dying Speeches, *passim*.

2. Examine this matter, as it concerns *Families*. Thousands of families, as well as tens of thousands of individuals, have been delivered not only from sin and wickedness, but also from wretchedness and poverty, by the instrumentality of the Methodists: but there never was an instance of the reverse! It is true, not a few, who were indebted to us, as the means, for all they had, have proved ungrateful both to God and Man, and have become proud and self-conceited, and would not conform to our Rules, and consequently left us, and turned again to the works of darkness, some of whom have been reduced to beggary! But surely, we are no more answerable for their conduct, than St. Paul was for the conduct of Demas, Hymeneus and Philetus; or than the Christians of the fourth century were for that of Julian the apostate. We have mourned over many of these, when we have seen the manner in which their families are governed, and in which their children have been (and still continue to be) educated. They have been solemnly warned of their danger, both from the pulpit and the press;* therefore their blood is upon their own heads, though still we suffer reproach on their account. And though we allow that there are some families among us, who might attend to *family-worship* better than they do, this proves nothing on the present occasion; for, the worst of them attend to it as well as they did before they

* See Mr. Wesley's Magazine-Sermons. Especially, sermon 1—3—17—18—23—34—35—38—40—41—49—50—54—60—61—63. Read these, ye rich Methodists, and tremble lest the Author rise up in judgment against you!

they knew us, and as well as most of their neighbours do, who have nothing to do with us. Hence as Methodism is not to be blamed on account of those, whether rich or poor, who forsake it; as it has produced the most salutary effects in those families who have conscientiously adhered to it; and as even those who are not so strict as they ought to be, are still as good as any of those who oppose us; we may fairly infer, that there is no just ground to speak evil of us, on account of any consequences that have happened among families, through their becoming Methodists.

3. Once more, let us weigh this subject, as it relates to the *State* and *Community* at large. Are there better subjects in the British Empire than the Methodists? Who ever knew any of them betray their Country, by taking bribes at Elections? or by buying or selling uncustomed goods? If ever there were such, they broke our known rules, and were certainly put away if detected. What Member of our Society was ever concerned in riots or mobs, on any account? How few of them ever failed in business? In short, are they not as steady friends to their King and Country as any people in the land? Who in the kingdom, pray more fervently and constantly for his Majesty and his family than we do? and that from the most disinterested motives! Our principles, respecting Civil Government, being founded, not upon political manœuvres, but upon the holy Scriptures;* whatever government we live under, we are "subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." We

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* Rom. xiii. 1—7. Tit. iii. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 13—17.

have published our sentiments on this head, in the Minutes of our last Conference, in these words: ---*“ We are to observe, that the oracles of God command us to be subject to the higher powers; and that honour to the King is there connected with the fear of God.” Agreeable to these principles we have uniformly conducted ourselves, though we have not wanted temptations to act otherwise!

If then Methodism have promoted the temporal, spiritual, and eternal welfare of hundreds of thousands---if it have produced such blessed effects in thousands of Families---if it tend to make its adherents good men, good relations, good neighbours, good citizens, and good subjects---why are the Methodists spoken against?---I had almost said, why are they not universally applauded? It is, because there is that in the heart of every unregenerate person, which never did, and never will accord with the three grand points, which we constantly enforce.

1. We humble the pride of man, by speaking in the most degrading terms of human nature, till it is changed by Grace. Adopting the language of Scripture, we represent the *understanding* of man as totally dark to every thing that is good.---“ The God of this world having blinded the eyes of them which believe not.”---“ Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild asses colt.” We speak of his *heart* as being “ abominable and filthy, so that he drinketh in iniquity like water.” And, “ That every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.” Concerning his *will*, we testify that it is perverse, and utterly set
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against every thing that is good. That our regeneration is "not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." We declare, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God---so that they that are in the flesh, (in their natural state) cannot please God:" For, while they remain unbelievers, "even their *mind* and *conscience* are defiled." Respecting the *Passions*, they are all disorder and malignity, governed by sense and appetite, and mere instruments of a diabolical agency, where preventing grace does not interpose. As touching the *state* of man, he is a condemned criminal, under sentence of death, entirely destitute of any power of his own, to free himself from his deplorable condition. To sum up the melancholy picture, in the words of Saint Paul, "There is none righteous, no not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre: with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.---So that every mouth is stopped, and the whole world is guilty before God."* In short, we insist upon it wherever we go, and upon all occasions, that man is an *ignorant, unclean, guilty, miserable, helpless* creature. And this description is so mortifying to the haughty spirit of fallen

* Rom. iii. 10--19.

fallen man, that it rouses up all his powers to oppose the truth and all who teach it. Hence, when it can do nothing else, it will give a loose to the unruly member to speak all manner of evil of them.

2. We constantly exalt Christ, as the author and finisher of our faith. This enrages the powers of darkness, who hate and dread the Son of God. We point him out as the promised Seed, clothed with the frailties of humanity, and triumphing over the usurped dominion of the ancient Dragon. We glory to set him forth, as the Shiloh of Jacob, to whom should be the gathering of the people.---The Emmanuel of Isaiah, which is God with us---God in our nature---and in our world, magnifying the law and making it honorable.---The Messiah of Daniel, cut off, not for himself, but for the sins of the people; to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. We hold him up, as the ALPHA and OMEGA, the BEGINNING and the ENDING, which is and which was, and which is to come, the ALMIGHTY---The FIRST and the LAST.---The ROOT and the OFFSPRING of David, and the BRIGHT and MORNING STAR.---The EQUAL with the FATHER.---Jehovah's FELLOW---THE CENTRE OF THE DEITY, IN WHOM DWELLETH ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY---The ONE WITH GOD, being the BRIGHTNESS OF HIS GLORY, and the EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS PERSON---The FIRST BEGOTTEN OF THE DEAD, and the PRINCE OF THE KINGS of the earth; having his name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS---THE BLESSED AND ONLY POTENTATE---THE KING

KING ETERNAL, IMMORTAL, AND IN-VISIBLE---GOD OVER ALL, BLESSED FOR EVERMORE! We demand the allegiance of all with whom we have to do, to this blessed Saviour---we challenge their obedience to Jesus of Nazareth; and pronounce them doomed to everlasting destruction, who refuse to reverence him as their Lord and God, and who will not have him to reign over them. This is the preaching which we have proved to be the power of God unto salvation; and which has always been a stumbling block and foolishness to the unsanctified reason of degenerate man. No wonder, therefore, that those who will not acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ, nor submit to be saved by his merit, should speak against those who so earnestly declare, that no one can come unto the Father but by him. This is the great offence---the glorying in Christ crucified, and leaving no room for any to put confidence in the flesh.

To these two---humbling human nature, and exalting Christ, may be added, that,

3. We preach up holiness of heart and life, and endeavour to act consistent with our profession.---This is what the men of the world cannot bear.---They must either condemn their own conduct, and embrace religion, however despised and rejected by the wise and prudent, or they must oppose religious people in self-defence. Few are so ingenuous as to acknowledge the force of divine truth, and yield to conviction; therefore they mostly endeavour to justify their own conduct, and condemn that religion which condemns them. And as its real possessors are not content to let immortal spirits go to destruction,

destruction, without reproving them, and warning them of their danger, the pride of careless sinners is hurt; and as resentment is the offspring of pride, this breaks out upon all occasions; and the best treatment that sincere and zealous Christians, of whatever denomination, have to expect from an ungodly world, is to be *every where spoken against*.

Permit me to add a word of advice.---If any of you cannot be altogether with us, let us alone, *lest haply ye be found even to fight against God*.---To those who are convinced in their judgments that these things are true, I say, Be not half-hearted in religion. *If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.* 1 Kings, xviii. 21. Jesus Christ declares, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* Matt. vi 24. And, that if ye be lukewarm, destitute of zeal for the promotion of true religion, *he will spue you out of his mouth.* Rev. iii. 1. Therefore be not afraid of man, nor ashamed of the gospel of Christ.---To you with whom I am more particularly concerned, as being members of our Society, I say, Live up to your privileges. *Cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart,* Be consistent. Let none be able to confront your Principles by your Example. Bear patiently the contradiction of sinners. Endure to the end. The Crown of life is before you. May God enable us all to give diligence to make our calling and election sure!---That so an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! To whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever! Amen.

Finis.

